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The China Factor in Regional Security Cooperation The ASEAN Regional Forum and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

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This article argues that regional security cooperation in South-East Asia, mainly promoted by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), is a response to China's economic rise. Although China is not regarded as a military challenge, Beijing's ascension threatens to undermine the regional balance of power. The emerging insecurities threaten the stability of the regimes whose power is based on output legitimacy. Cooperation, the thesis states, can reduce these uncertainties. Yet, whereas collaboration in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) offers Beijing incentives for the strengthening of its "enlightened" multilateralism, regional cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) will not change China's behaviour. The reason is that this cooperation is based on Realpolitik motives. Offensive Realism seems therefore well suited to analyse the Central Asian power relations. Even though the dimension of cooperation has not been included in John Mearsheimer's approach, this article demonstrates that it can conceptually be integrated into offensive Realism without contradicting its core theses. For this, however, its adherents must accept two assumptions: First, that the domestic political logic - in case of Beijing the output legitimacy of the Communist Party - must be integrated. Second, that there exists no automatism in international politics. Otherwise one would have to speak of the tragic of offensive Realism: Policies, based on this perception, does not offer China sufficient incentives to further pursue multilateralism.

Keywords: *Regionalism, Regional Cooperation, Security, China, ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum, Shanghai Cooperation Organization*

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In diesem Aufsatz wird argumentiert, dass die regionale sicherheitspolitische Integration in Südost- und Nordostasien, primär von der südostasiatischen Staatengemeinschaft ASEAN vorangetrieben, eine Reaktion auf Chinas wirtschaftlichen Aufstieg verkörpert. Dieser droht das regionale Kräftegleichgewicht zu untergraben, wodurch er Unsicherheiten weckt und damit eine Gefahr für die auf Stabilität angewiesenen Regime darstellt, die ihre Macht auf Output-Legitimation gründen. Kooperation, so die These, kann diese Unsicherheiten reduzieren. Doch während die Zusammenarbeit im Rahmen des ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Pekings Außenpolitik Anreize zur Stärkung seines aufgeklärten Multilateralismus bietet, sind entsprechende Verhaltensänderung von der regionalen Zusammenarbeit in Zentralasien nicht zu erwarten. Dies weil die Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) nach wie vor rein auf realpolitischen Motiven basiert und weshalb offensiver Realismus bestens zur Analyse der Machtverhältnisse Zentralasiens geeignet scheint. Die Dimension Kooperation ist in John Mearsheimers Ansatz zwar nicht vorgesehen, wie dieser Aufsatz zeigt, kann sie jedoch konzeptionell in den offensiven Realismus integriert werden, ohne dessen Kernthesen zu widersprechen. Allerdings müssten VertreterInnen des offensive Realismus dafür zwei gedankliche Erweiterungen akzeptieren: Zum einen, dass die innenpolitische Logik im Falle Pekings die Output-Legitimation der Kommunistischen Partei integriert werden muss. Zum anderen, dass es keinen Automatismus in internationaler Politik gibt. Andernfalls müsste von einer Tragik des offensiven Realismus gesprochen werden: Politik, basierend auf dieser Anschauung, bietet China nicht genügend Anreize, um weiterhin eine multilateralen Kurs zu verfolgen.

Schlagworte: Regionalismus, regionale Kooperation, Sicherheit, China, ASEAN, ASEAN Regional Forum, Shanghai Cooperation Organization

1. Introduction

After the first decolonisation wave in the 1950s and early 1960s, the newly independent nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America were, at least verbally, committed to strengthening their economic and political cooperation with their neighbours. Similar to Europe, regional collaboration was driven both by internal and external rationales, though the negatively defined security motives dominated. Hence regional collaboration was regarded as a strategic means to secure the survival of the fragile new regimes by reducing external interferences in the processes of nation-building and socioeconomic development. Wary of protecting their sovereignty and usually distrusting their neighbours, cooperation was - despite the overarching security goals - limited to economic, technical and cultural affairs. Even integration advocates agreed to this cautious, evolutionary approach as many of them regarded limited functional collaboration as the first step in the direction of (sub-)regional political unity. Thus from the 1960s on, regional cooperation was formalised and institutionalised throughout the Third World through regional treaties and intergovernmental organisations such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU) or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and on sub-

regional level (e.g. the Economic Community of West African States or the Andean Pact). Regional economic cooperation was en vogue in the 1960s, though very limited, due to the complimentary character of the involved economies and the dominance of import-substitution industrialization (Bhalla & Bhalla 1997: 1-9).

In one region, though, regional cooperation has been elusive ever since: in North-East Asia, which lacked multilateral structures till the early 1990s (Ikenberry & Tsuchiyama 2002: 70). Even in South-East Asia, though, till the late 1980s it was more appropriate to speak of regionalization - transnational and regional collaboration promoted by the market forces, especially multinational companies, or transnational active ethnic networks - rather than of regionalism, i.e. the deliberate political steering of regional cooperation in different political spheres (Fawcett 2004: 431-434; Dent 2003: 121). Only in the late 1980s did the South-East Asian governments, organized in ASEAN, respond proactively to the external security and economic challenges with a deepening of their integration efforts. Nevertheless, ASEAN was on the forefront of the second wave of regionalism that gained momentum in the mid-1980s. Fuelled by the rising economic interdependence, the fears of (Western) trade blocs and globalization, this new regionalism tends to be open, non-discriminatory and inclusive (Liu 2003a: 13; Bhalla & Bhalla 1997).

Since the early 1990s ASEAN is the key promoter of regional cooperation, even in the sensitive realm of security, and this both in South-East and North-East Asia. What has not changed, though, is the domestic logic of regional collaboration: the governments regard it as a means to mitigate external influences that could endanger economic development. As the legitimacy of the semi-democratic or authoritarian regimes in South-East Asia is primarily based on their ability to deliver economic benefits to their citizens rather than on respect for due democratic processes - output instead of input legitimacy -, an economic downturn could be a direct threat to their survival (cf. Cheng 2006: 91). To secure a stable regional political order is therefore a *conditio sine qua non* for economic growth, trade, foreign direct investments and tourism.

The main thesis of this article argues that due to the political primacies of output legitimacy and regional stability, regional security cooperation in South-East and North-East is a reaction to today's single most crucial challenge for stability and the balance of power in South-East and North-East Asia: China's economic, political and military rise to a great power. Yet, the argument is, that China's rise does not raise fears of a military dominance in East Asia. Rather Beijing's ascension still causes feelings of uncertainty in regard to China's perceptions and strategic long-term intentions (Chung 2008: 172; Ong 2007: 721; Dillon & Tkacik 2005). In order to diminish these uncertainties, ASEAN attempts since the mid-1990s to engage and even "socialize" Beijing through multilateral cooperation.

The research question asks, first, whether regional security cooperation in East Asia has altered China's diplomatic behaviour. Secondly, it will be assessed if offensive Realism (Mearsheimer 2003) is conceptually able to explain regional security collaboration. Therefore ASEAN's (Chapter 2) as well as China's motives for cooperation in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) will be analysed, examining Beijing's adoption of multilateralism in the mid-1990s (Chapter 3). In addition, the reasons for regional security collaboration in East Asia will be compared with the cooperation logic in the Central Asian Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (Chapters 3.2.1 and 3.2.2). It will be demonstrated that, unlike in the SCO, the China factor or the "China threat" played a decisive role for the creation of the ARF.

Despite the focus on two multilateral institutions as promoters of regional collaboration offensive Realism rather than liberal institutionalism (Dunne 2008; Keohane & Martin 1995) will be applied (Chapter 3.2). The reason is that neorealist approaches seem best suited to explain the competitive strategic landscape both in East and Central Asia. Yet while offensive Realism is a realistic approach to conceptually frame China's rise, it is analytically limited to examine great power relations. In addition, it regards cooperation only as a tool for the governments (Mearsheimer 2003: chap. 2). As regional collaboration is a reality both in East and Central Asia, it will be asked if the dimension of cooperation can be added to the conceptual frame of offensive Realism, without contradicting its basic theoretical assumptions.

2. Regional Cooperation in South-East and North-East Asia

2.1 External Motives in ASEAN's Integration Process

After the end of the ideological and military superpower rivalry in 1989/91, the perspective of a political power vacuum - and in particular the perception that Japan or China might aim to fill it - threatened security in the Asia-Pacific. Moscow, after the demise of the Warsaw Pact, lacked the political will as well as the financial and diplomatic resources for pursuing an active East Asia policy. Washington, the hegemonic power since 1945, downgraded its political engagement (Gershman 2002: 60-61). Among certain Asian nations this gave rise to the perception of a strategic retreat of the US (Leifer 1999: 34). After the terror bombings of September 11, 2001, when the new Bush administration started to view South-East Asia as the second front in the war on terror, Washington once again intensified its strategic commitment. Yet, its focus on security issues and bilateral cooperation with key allies conflicts with "the region's priorities of domestic economic development and political stability" (Economy 2005: 411; cf. interviews in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, December 2008).

The looming power vacuum was especially dangerous in North-East Asia, as in this region multilateral collaboration was the exception, not the rule (Liu & Régnier 2003). The South-East Asian nations were since the 1960s used to cooperation in a broad area of policy fields, although the collaboration was not deep reaching till 1992. Like in other world regions, cooperation has been mainly driven by external factors and domestic logics: The primary motive for Bangkok, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Manila for establishing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1967 was to reduce outside interferences into their socioeconomic development and nation-building, be it from their ASEAN partners, East Asian or outside actors (Kahler 2000: 551). At this time, ASEAN's main external threats were the negative security impacts of the Vietnam war and communist infiltration. With two security orientated initiatives, the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) in 1971 and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 1976, ASEAN subsequently aimed to insulate itself "from great power maneuverings" (Garofano 2002: 514). Moreover, the TAC was also a proactive attempt to order South-East Asia according to the principles of the "ASEAN way" and the start of closer cooperation with the US, Japan and the United Nations to resolve the Indochina crisis. Facing the common threat posed by Vietnam, in the early 1990s ASEAN's diplomatic conflict resolution approach in Indochina proved highly successful, also due to Hanoi's new *doi moi* policies and superpower détente. However, even at this time ASEAN was divided whether Vietnam or China should be regarded as the bigger security threat (Leifer 1999: 30).

The end of the superpower rivalry, though, also questioned ASEAN's *raison d'être*. In dire need of a new political purpose, ASEAN decided at the Singapore summit in 1992 to use economic tools to deepen its integration (Capie 2003: 154-155). The ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) was a response to the European Community's Single Market project and the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) but also a symbol for ASEAN's inability to agree on a common security policy able to address the new transnational security menaces (cf. Antolik 1992: 144 and 147-151).

In 1997, though, the Asian Financial crisis uncovered the deficiencies of ASEAN's cautious integration approach. The institution seemed politically paralyzed and lacked the authority to enforce the AFTA commitments (Dent 2007: 24). Accusing Washington and the Western dominated International Monetary Fund (IMF) of prescribing the wrong cure, many East Asian politicians turned to Beijing for support. Indeed, China played a positive role in resolving the crisis (Cheng 2006: 94), in particular in ASEAN plus Three which connects ASEAN institutionally with China, Japan and South Korea. Initially limited to financial collaboration, ASEAN+3 evolved into the most important multilateral forum in East Asia, covering strategic, political and economic issues (Beeson 2003, Stubbs 2002). However, as the logic of regional cooperation is an economical one (Wanandi 2005: 324), it comes as no surprise that the main achievement

of this comprehensive collaboration is economical: the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (CAFTA). Yet there is also a crucial psychological and political outcome: an increase of mutual trust. In initiating CAFTA and, in particular, offering the lesser developed ASEAN partners significant economic concessions (“early harvest”), improved its image and credibility in South-East Asia (cf. interviews in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, December 2008).

In retrospect, the financial and political crisis of 1997 was also a catalyst for deeper integration. Acknowledging the limits of the “ASEAN way” (ASEAN Eminent Persons Group 2000), in 2003 ASEAN announced its ambitious plans for an Asian Community by the year 2015, based on an economic, security and socio-cultural pillar (Bali Concord II). Yet, these objectives remain to be filled with concrete policies.

Overall, regional cooperation in South-East Asia - a region that has always been successful in accommodating external influences (SarDesai 2003) - can till the early 1990s be best described as “reactionary regionalism” (Beeson 2003: 251). Although economic motives dominated, the notion in South-East Asia has always been that mutual economic progress facilitates a stable and peaceful regional order. In the early 1990s, though, the regional political and economic dynamics did profoundly change (Shambaugh 2005: 64), with China’s perceived quest for regional dominance being the core strategic challenge for North-East and South-East Asia (Collins 2000: 133). ASEAN’s strategic and institutional response - its initiative for creating the ASEAN Regional Forum - symbolizes the adoption of a more proactive approach.

<i>Table 1: Periodization of ASEAN’s Integration Process</i>			
Period	Type of Regionalism	Driving Forces	Overall Orientation
1967-1975	Reactionary or negative	external: security	domestic
1976-1992	Limited, “diplomatic”	security; market	domestic, increasingly regional
1992-1997	Neutral, “bandwagon”	trade, security	domestic and regional
1997-2002	Cautious proactive	economics, “Asianness”, China’s rise	regional
2003-	Proactive	China’s rise, output legitimacy, “Asianness”	pan-regional

Source: Own compilation.

2.2 The ASEAN Regional Forum: Dialoguing, Socializing, Befriending

In the 1990s, there was - and still is - no shortage of unresolved disputes in East Asia. Inter alia, the tensions on the Korean Peninsula, the Sino-Taiwanese relations or the island disputes in the South Chinese Sea could escalate into a regional military conflict. On the other hand both abstract and concrete transnational threats have increased. These include, for instance, piracy, illegal trafficking of drugs, weapons and people, social inequalities, the spread of mass diseases or environmental degradation (Rüland 2005). The main fear in the 1990s, though, was that a vague feeling of insecurity in the region, rooted in mutual distrust, could hamper the national socioeconomic development processes. This in a region where the legitimacy of the majority of the governments is based on their ability to create and distribute wealth (Cheng 2006: 91).

Even though many governments in East Asia acknowledged the need for multilateral regional security cooperation after 1989, the priority for sovereignty and non-interference, the unresolved conflicts among many nations and the lack of a clearly definable common threat overshadowed all hopes for a big institutional bang such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) mechanism (Acharya 1997: 321). The creation of the ARF in 1994 thus reflects a compromise - and the fairly moderate expectations of the governments in regard to security collaboration. Yuen Foong Khong's pointed summary of Michael Leifer's (1996) "line of reasoning" still sums up best the intentions of the ARF: "(t)o keep (a) the United States in, (b) China and Japan down, and (c) ASEAN relevant and safe (...)" (Khong 1997: 290). In addition, the new security structures should provide possibilities for regular meetings, exchange of information, dialogue and confidence building measures to decrease mutual distrust and uncertainties through the acquaintance with different ways of strategic thinking (Kawasaki 2006; ARF 1995).

Accordingly, the focus of the loosely institutionalized ARF is, unlike in the highly institutionalized Western security institutions, on cooperative, not on collective security. Security is defined in comprehensive terms, including traditional as well as non-traditional threats. Regarded as an honest (Asian) broker, the other East Asian nations allowed the political and military comparatively weak ASEAN to take the leadership role in institution-building in East Asia. Basically, the ARF is an extended multilateralized version of the ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conferences (PMC) that ASEAN holds with key dialogue partners after its foreign minister meetings. Hence the guiding ASEAN principles of non-interference, non-discrimination, pragmatism, voluntarism, informal and consensual rather than rule-based majority decision-making - the (in-)famous "ASEAN Way" (Acharya 2001: 172-179; Acharya 1997: 328-333; Kawasaki 2006: 222-223) - are reflected in the ARF. Chaired by ASEAN, it is

also the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta that oversees the work of the ARF which has no own bureaucracy. Overall, as Amitav Acharya (2004: 259) puts it: “The ARF imitates ASEAN’s organizational minimalism.” In many senses, not only ASEAN and the ARF but also the ARF and the broad Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) can be regarded as twins.

Notwithstanding the justified criticism, the establishment of the ARF reflects a major political breakthrough, as in 1994 both Beijing and Washington were committed to a bilateral rather than multilateral approach. In addition, the short- and mid-term focus of ASEAN as the ARF architect was fairly ambitious: to install a process of dialogue and confidence-building that both broadens and deepens over time. Only after the institution has reached a more mature stage, an evolution into a more robust conflict resolving institution seemed political feasible for ASEAN (ARF 1995). And in fact, since 1994 the security organization has gradually progressed institutionally and normatively: Annual ministerial meetings evolved into more frequent senior official and military expert meetings, and the civil society participation in the “track two” mechanism has been strengthened, as have the confidence building measures.

Highlighting the political logic behind the ARF process, Chien-peng Chung (2008: 172) writes: “The essential idea behind the ARF is that the process of dialoguing should lead to socialization of member states’ behavior, which in turn ought to result in the dissolution of conflicts of interests.” Overall, the ARF approach combines the balance of power concept, the principle of inclusive regionalism, the notion of conflict resolution together with, not against certain countries and the idea of socializing or even befriending the partners (cf. Acharya 2001: 173).

Although the ARF is today the only organisation in East Asia with an exclusive security focus, it is politically far from resembling a regional security system. The prospects for the evolution into a “security community” in Karl W. Deutsch’s sense remain even more remote (Rolfe 2008: 106-107; Wanandi 2005). This the case due to severe political obstacles such as the exclusion of the Sino-Taiwanese and the North Korean dispute but also because of the restricting “ASEAN” diplomatic values (Acharya 2001: 178; Khong 1997: 292). The next step in the ARF’s evolution would be to go behind confidence building and adopt preventive conflict resolution.

Overall, in its present form the ARF cannot resolve ASEAN’s main concern: While the ASEAN members do appreciate China’s new multilateralism, they remain skeptical in regard to Beijing’s true long-term intentions and ambitions. All these shortcomings raise serious questions in regard to the ability of the ARF to contain or assimilate the rising China. Though this is, according to John Mearsheimer, a political necessity. The strategic regional - and global - impacts of Beijing’s possible strive for hegemony in East Asia have been conceptualized in his theory of offensive Realism.

3. Beijing's New Multilateral Credentials: Engaging in the ARF and the SCO

3.1 China's Rise and its New Multilateral Credentials

In 1978, Deng Xiaoping succeeded in the post-Mao internal power struggles of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Replacing the economic principles of self-reliance and inward-orientation with the market principle and integration into the world market, the new momentum of the Chinese economy elevated China's position in the regional and global distribution of economic and political power. In the first phase, the regime focussed on achieving economic growth, accepting tremendous social inequalities especially among rural and urban citizens. Politically Beijing opened up to the outside world too: Having played a "destabilizing and negative" (Limaye 2007: 459) role in East Asia after 1949 (e.g. support for Communist insurgents), China started to redefine its political and economic relations with North-East and South-East Asia (India discovered its East Asian neighbourhood only in the late 1990s). Though, in accordance with Deng's credo, it kept a low profile in regional (and global) politics (Wang 2005: 675). Till the mid-1990s, it pursued its interests bilaterally. Once diplomatic relations has been established with Jakarta and Singapore in 1990 and Seoul in 1992, China's trade with the respective countries boomed. From 1991 on, Beijing and ASEAN gradually improved their relations too, starting with scientific, educational, trade and economic collaboration (Lijun 2003: 2). The new charm offensive in East Asia was not at least a strategic response to the diplomatic isolation China faced in the Western world after the Tiananmen massacre in 1989.

Acknowledging the demise of the Communist ideology as the main source for its legitimacy, the CPC leadership, divided in the aftermath of "Tiananmen", adopted the concept of a rational-authoritarian order and technocratic leadership (Guo 2003: 11-16). It started to increasingly base its legitimacy on its ability to furthermore ensure socioeconomic development, i.e. output legitimacy (National Intelligence Council 2008: 28-29; Wang 2005: 681-686). Subsequently, as the domestic aims of the Chinese reform policies have become logically increasingly connected to the foreign policy sphere, the fears of social and political unrests at the domestic front triggered a fundamental change in Beijing's foreign policy: already in the mid-1990s, it reduced its bilateralism in favour of multilateralism (Qinggong & Wei 1997). The "fourth generation" under Hu Jintao, in charge since 2002, has further embraced multilateralism - and pragmatism: the party has realized that a favourable ("harmonious") regional and global environment, created through multilateral collaboration, is the *conditio sine qua non* for the creation of a modestly rich, harmonious society with a more just income distribution Hu Jintao envisions (Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China

2005: chap. V). Such a middle class society would also be a political insulator against possible nationalist sentiments that could trigger a more aggressive, nationalistic foreign policy.

Yet exactly because of its burgeoning economic power its neighbours - and the world in general - remain skeptical in regard to the true intentions of the CPC. The Chinese leadership, though, knows that it must reduce this distrust. Thus in 2004 the then Prime Minister Wen Jiabo claimed China would never seek regional hegemony (Xinhua News Agency 2004; cf. Li Zhaoxing 2006), painting the picture of a status quo power. Overall, the new doctrine from 2003 states that Beijing's rise is peaceful (*heping jueqi*) - and beneficial for the whole world. For its socioeconomic development China needs the world (Zhang 2008: 16-17; Ong 2007: footnote 13), in particular secure access to raw materials in South America, Africa, Central Asia or Australia. But, as the self-assured leadership adds, the world also needs China. In this view, China's peaceful rise offers a win-win situation for humankind. Accordingly, under Hu the CPC has officially further embraced multilateralism and "is using a sophisticated blend of trade, confidence building measures, and even development assistance to establish itself as an important regional leader" (Economy 2005: 413).

Paradoxically, the more Beijing increases its multilateral credentials, the more the Chinese leadership is confronted with a strategic and political dilemma: while the West demands clear words and actions from China, notably where it clearly yields political influence, such as in Burma, North Korea or Sudan (cf. Rice 2008), the CPC's response to the distrust it faces is to keep a low profile in global politics (Shi 2008: 25-26). China's conceptual answer is to project the image of a soft power which is engaged in multilateral cooperation and abstains from the use of force. As this concept stresses the non-military, especially the economic and cultural abilities of a state to influence international politics, it is theoretically an ideal political response of the CPC to the "China threat" perceptions of the outside world (cf. Yu 2007: 118-119; Yang 2007). Yet, while the soft power label seems an adequate description of the potential and the limits of the European Union in international politics, it gravely underrates China's current political and military might: Beijing has already developed into a powerful smart power.

3.2 Theoretical Conceptualization of China's Rise: Offensive Realism

Responding to the fundamental structural changes after the demise of the stable Cold War order and the perceived limits of Kenneth Waltz' (defensive) Neorealism (Mearsheimer 2004: 109-112), John Mearsheimer developed a security orientated approach that has become popular in International Security Studies. Contradicting defensive realist assumptions that due

to the anarchic international system states aim to increase their security, yet aspiring only an “appropriate” amount of power that does not lure others in an arms race, Mearsheimer believes that the great powers must seek as much power as possible. He poses that this is a rational response of the governments which, undisturbed by domestic logics, simply “read” the “objective” incentives and constraints of the international system, but can never trust the (future) intentions of other nations. Similar to a classical Greek play, tragedy is inescapable: the more power one of the great nations acquires relative to others, the more pressure do the others face to maximize their might (Mearsheimer 2003: 35).

Global dominance, though, Mearsheimer believes, is not feasible anymore because geography still limits global power projection. Being rational actors in a self-help world, it is thus wise for (potential) great powers to strive for regional hegemony. Furthermore, Mearsheimer (2003: chap. 2) postulates that great powers must check rising nations in other world regions too - otherwise they would rather sooner than later see themselves challenged in their very own hemisphere by their opponent (Mearsheimer 2003: 2 and 41). China’s rise, he claims, fits into this classical great power pattern. Consequently, it is only a question of time until Beijing starts to translate its economic might into military and political power, aiming to dominate East Asia. Yet, based on his solely structural reading of the international system, Mearsheimer predicts that

“It is unlikely that China will pursue military superiority so that it can go on a rampage and conquer other Asian countries, although that is always possible. Instead, it is more likely that it will want to dictate the boundaries of acceptable behaviour to neighbouring countries (...)” (Mearsheimer 2005: 14).

As the Chicago professor deliberately limits the scope of his theory to great power relations he necessarily views Washington as the only counterweight. Believing that many other East Asian nations fear Beijing’s increasing power, he claims they would join a US-led attempt to contain Beijing and slow down its economic growth (Mearsheimer 2003: 402; Layne 2008: 16-17).

Logically, in Mearsheimer’s worldview, the prospects for cooperation are limited. Collaboration is an instrument for the great powers to counter-balance their rivals, for smaller nations to either bandwagon or join a counter-alliance of one of the great powers (cf. Snyder 2002: 164-167 and 172). Mearsheimer stresses the neorealist belief that relative gains consideration and cheating undermine all cooperation efforts (Mearsheimer 1995: 12; but cf. Keohane & Martin 1995: 43-46). Another crucial obstacle for him is the impossibility of governments to judge the true (future) intentions of their counterparts. Possible positive incentives of the domestic systems for international cooperation are also excluded in Mearsheimer’s approach, so are prospects for policy-learning, based on successes and rewards achieved through absolute gains cooperation. Institutions, in the neoliberal institutionalist

view quasi-independent facilitators for state cooperation, are regarded as dominated by governments, reflecting their national interests (Mearsheimer 1995: 13).

Yet, I believe, that the dimension of cooperation can be conceptually included into offensive Realism, without contradicting its fundamental assumptions. Mearsheimer's theory is pessimistic, yet it does not necessarily stipulate an automatism that leads to war. Containment like during the relative stable Cold War era is a possibility. Though, the containment strategy in Europe was based on a multilateral political, economic and military cooperation, even an alliance between North America and Western Europe. Furthermore, despite Moscov's predominance and the character of forced cooperation, even the Eastern Block nations collaborated in a depth that exceeded the classic counter-alliance or bandwagon concepts. Due to the economic interdependence and superpower détente, from the 1970s on the two blocks used multilateral negotiations, in particular the confidence-building CSCE process, as means to decrease their tensions. Overall, this cooperative security mechanism did not end the regional and global rivalries of the superpowers but it contributed to a peaceful settlement of the conflicts in Europe.

One of Mearsheimer's key assumptions, however, would be challenged if it could be demonstrated that cooperation can change the behaviour of states, for instance, to make them more inclined towards peaceful multilateral cooperation or towards the notion of sharing the economic or security benefits with their neighbours. The next chapters will examine whether China has really embraced regional cooperation in East and Central Asia.

3.2.1 China's Rationales for its Engagement in the ARF

To engage China in the ARF was a tremendous achievement for ASEAN, yet without Beijing's explicit will to become a player in ARF, ASEAN would not have succeeded. Thus it has to be asked why the Chinese leadership - till the 1990s not used to multilateralism - has committed itself to the ARF process.

Fearing the internationalization of the Taiwan conflict or of the territorial disputes in the South Chinese Sea and the institutionalisation of the US dominance in East Asia, Beijing viewed the ARF very skeptical initially. It feared that ASEAN, during the Cold War regarded as a Western dominated, anti-Communist institution would promote Washington's interests. In the mid-1990s, due to intensified relations, China quickly learned that regional cooperation is not directed against Beijing. It increasingly acknowledged ASEAN's role as an honest (Asian) broker that embraces similar diplomatic values such as sovereignty, non-interference and consensual decision-making (cf. interviews in Singapore, December 2008). Moreover, Beijing

and ASEAN share the notions of output legitimacy and comprehensive security, and both reject the Western advocacy of human rights and democracy. The Chinese leaders could therefore regard the ARF, *inter alia*, as a tool to counter-balance the United States and Western influences in general (cf. Cheng 2004: 260-261). Another motive for joining the ARF was its institutional weakness - its lack of power to sanction members in case of misconduct suited Beijing.

As the ARF strengthened its confidence building measures, thus increasing mutual trust through dialogue and transparency, Beijing deepened its commitment. The concrete work in the ARF required an adaption of the Chinese foreign policy and military experts who were not as familiar with multilateral diplomacy as their East Asian partners. In the late 1990s certain observers (Johnston 1999; Foot 1998; cf. Heller 2005: 141-142) noticed a transformative effect of China's participation in the ARF, reflected not only through a "tremendous change" (Ba 2003: 622) in the Sino-ASEAN relations since 1989 but in Beijing's new commitment to multilateralism in general. For instance, in 2002 China signed the TAC and in 2003 agreed to multilateral cooperation to resolve the territorial disputes in the South Chinese Sea (yet notably the conflict with Vietnam remains) and transnational threats such as health, environmental degradation, migration or drug trafficking (Economy 2005: 417-418 and 421-423). Hence it is no coincidence that at the same time as Beijing multilateralized its policies in East Asia, it also started to actively promote regional cooperation in Central Asia.

3.2.2 China's Rationales for its Engagement in the SCO

Strategically located at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, Central Asia has always been a theoretical paradise for realist International Relations scholars: already in 1904, Halford J. Mackinder has in his Heartland Theory postulated the global dominance of the power that controls this region. National interests and the attempt to create spheres of influence - in other words: power politics - can still explain the regional dynamics in this resource rich region. Since the 18th century under Russian control, the decline of Moscow's power after the end of the Cold War has led to a power vacuum in this former buffer zone. Both Washington and Beijing were eager to fill this void, deepening their political, military and economic relations with the newly independent nations. Initially focusing on securing their access to oil and gas fields, because of 9/11 and the war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan the United States increased its military presence; for instance, it rented military bases in Uzbekistan.

Moscow, on the other side, has in the last years reclaimed its place in its "near abroad". Hence the logic of offensive Realism seems striking: Both China and Russia, two longstanding

rivals, need to become the regional hegemon in Central Asia at the other's expense, whereas the United States attempts to prevent the regional ascendancy of both countries. Accordingly, cooperation can only be applied selectively and as a tool for achieving hegemony, for counterbalancing or bandwagoning. Subsequently, it will be tested whether this instrumental view can explain the evolution of intergovernmental collaboration in a region that has once again become geostrategically and geoeconomically vital.

Like in East Asia, multilateral collaboration started only in the mid-1990s with the Shanghai Five mechanism at its core. In 1996 the Shanghai Five provided a forum for resolving longstanding bi- and multilateral border conflicts among the members China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as well as for strengthening their border control mechanisms to tackle illegal trafficking of people, drugs and weapons. As the traditional security cooperation has proven surprisingly successful, in 2001 the Shanghai Five members agreed to let it spill over into other non-traditional security affairs and transformed the mechanism into a cooperative security institution, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The collaboration, though, remains strictly intergovernmental and under-institutionalized, because the SCO members deliberately do not envision supranational integration (Bailes & Dunay 2007: 4-5; cf. Chung 2006). The governments thus control the cooperation processes - the secretariat is weak and the national parliaments lack control rights -, and the objectives are based on their national security interests. The dominant players, of course, are the two great powers, while the smaller nations are at best partially successful in influencing China or Russia in siding with one of them against the other. Still, they are strategically better off in a situation in which they can deal in a multilateral forum rather than bilaterally with these two key players.

While the security definitions of the SCO and the ARF are very similar, the collaboration in the SCO is far more concrete. For the SCO, security encompasses socioeconomic development, energy and environment and includes complex, yet very real transnational non-traditional risks such as terrorism, organized crime, illegal trafficking of people, weapons and drugs, the latter in particular via Afghanistan (Cornell & Swanström 2006). Also in a reaction to the war in Afghanistan, China and Russia, both suspicious of Washington's military engagement, promoted stronger common counter-terrorism efforts, loosely institutionalized in the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). The SCO members also agreed to insulate the subregion from the spread of democracy, enabling them to individually and collectively dismiss even legitimate claims for democratization and autonomy as separatism or terrorism.

The main difference between China's participation in the ARF and the SCO is that from the beginnings of the Central Asian cooperation, China has been in the driver's seat. The "Shanghai spirit" of cooperation, albeit compatible with the "ASEAN way", is clearly a "Chinese" one. China initiated the Central Asian cooperation because it recognized that the main non-

traditional security menaces can best be resolved in a multilateral manner. In general, Beijing needs a peaceful Central Asian neighbourhood to achieve its energy security objectives and to develop its vast Western province. It also succeeded in regionally outlawing the Uighur separatist movement, notably the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), thus ending the support the ETIM has allegedly received from its Central Asian neighbours.

In regard to the evolution of the SCO, Beijing is far more ambitious than Moscow: Whereas the Chinese side promotes a deepening of trade and economic collaboration, Russia is reluctant, as it regards the SCO primarily as a means to pursue energy security (Cohen 2006: 2). This because it already possesses forums in Central Asia that it exclusively dominates, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). And not at least does Russia's distrust of China limit collaboration. Among many Russian politicians and scholars Beijing is not only perceived as a strategic rival but, for the first time in centuries, as more powerful than Moscow, raising fears that Russia is becoming dependent, possibly even China's vassal (Mohanty 2007: 255).

Despite the shared goal of reducing Washington's influence in this crucial region and fighting separatism and terrorism, the strategic rivalry between China and Russia reduces the prospects of a deepening of cooperation in Central Asia (Li 2007: 484-487). Accordingly - and notwithstanding the increased Sino-Chinese military cooperation that includes Russian weapons sales to China and even military manoeuvres -, the prospects of the evolution of the SCO into an authoritarian Central Asian NATO that strongly opposes Western influences and values are dim. Rather it will remain a surprisingly successful forum for discussing and even resolving some of the most dangerous transnational non-traditional security risks in Central Asia on a case by case basis. Whether the SCO can develop into a reliable regional security institution that interlinks Central Asia politically and institutionally with the existing trans-Atlantic, South, South-East and North-East Asian organizations (cf. Lanteigne 2007: 620-622; Luzyanin 2007) will depend on the future Sino-Russian relations as well as on the general Western - Russian and Western - Chinese relations. To sum up, national interests and power politics - and thus Neorealism - still explain best the successful but limited collaboration in Central Asia. The SCO members have never intended to use collaboration as a tool to change their diplomatic values or behaviour.

4. Conclusion

Regional cooperation in South-East Asia has always followed economic rationales and been externally and in particular security driven. Consequently, the emergence of the China factor

as a new external driving force for increased cooperation is not a new phenomenon per se. Fundamentally new, though, is that Beijing's economic, political and military rise to a great power undermines the hegemonic position of the United States, thus changing the traditional balance of power in East Asia. Aiming to engage China and keeping the United States involved in order to stabilize the existing regional order, ASEAN succeeded in establishing the ARF, a broad security forum in regard to the membership and the security topics covered. In the mid-1990s all ARF participants accepted ASEAN's leadership. Though, today in order to remain the key institutional driving force in East Asia with the regional powerhouses China, Japan and India, ASEAN has to deepen its own integration (Wanandi 2005: 330).

Just like in North-East Asia, regional collaboration is a recent phenomenon in Central Asia. While in the case of the ARF the "China threat" is a "negative" driving force, in the SCO China is the active leader that engages the other great power Russia and the smaller Central Asian nations in a successful cooperative security mechanism. Similar to the ARF, the SCO is strictly intergovernmental and based on a comprehensive definition of security and an evolutionary approach. However, unlike in the ARF, the collaboration is focused on concrete projects and has already yielded results (the resolution of border disputes, energy and infrastructure collaboration, increased economic relations). Nevertheless, the cooperation in the SCO still follows the principle of power politics and, consequently, has not altered the diplomatic attitudes and the actual behaviour of the SCO members. A prediction based on offensive Realism suggests that cooperation will only prevail as long as the governments regard it as useful.

The case study of the ARF has demonstrated that regional security cooperation promoted by an alliance of smaller nations is feasible and viable. The main insecurity the South-East and North-East Asian nations have to cope with is that they cannot predict whether China's rise will remain to be peaceful. Through multilateral cooperation in the ARF, but also in ASEAN+3, they can get insights into the strategic and diplomatic thinking and perceptions of their Chinese counterparts who today seem to have embraced multilateralism. For China, cooperation clearly has an instrumental value - a peaceful regional order facilitates its socioeconomic development. Moreover, multilateral collaboration is also a strong political message against Washington's unilateralism.

Overall, one can speak of an enlightened multilateralism Beijing's pursues, in particular in East Asia. Though does cooperation also has an intrinsic value for the Chinese leadership? Referring to constructivist, sociological and neoliberal institutional approaches, certain scholars believe in China's new multilateralism (Heller 2005: 141-142; Johnston 1999; Foot 1998), even that it sticks to the "ASEAN way" (cf. interviews in Singapore, Hanoi and Kuala Lumpur, December 2008). Others dismiss the notion that Beijing has truly embraced multilateralism

(Mearsheimer 2005; cf. Economy 2005: 413). They see a pattern of hegemonic aspirations in the Chinese history (Ong 2007: 721) or remain cautious, claiming that it is still too early to judge whether China's socialization in the ARF has been successful (Chung 2008: 172). Yet time is not the sole crucial variable. Social science approaches in general struggle to explain how and why decision-makers view the world in a certain manner and are why some are more inclined towards cooperation than others.

Scholars and politicians who regard the Chinese foreign policy through the lense of offensive Realism can logically never be convinced of Beijing's multilateral commitments. Offensive Realism postulates the inability of states to demonstrate their peaceful aims, as other governments can never be sure of their true beliefs and future plans. Would this approach consider domestic political logics - the CPC's output legitimacy requires a stable regional order for China's socioeconomic development - and the Asian "ideology" of pragmatism, it would see that Beijing clearly has inducements for multilateral collaboration.

To conclude, cooperation can be included without contradicting the core assumptions of offensive Realism. For this, however, offensive Realists have to accept that there is no structural automatism or tragic script the world leaders have to follow. Cooperation certainly has the potential to alter perceptions as well as the actual behaviour of states, though Mearsheimer's approach is conceptually not suited to prove this thesis. And therein lies the tragic of offensive Realism and similar neorealist concepts: May they be based on theoretical assumptions that either postulate a tragic automatism in international politics, on approaches that are conceptually not interested in acknowledging policy-learning or simply on ideologies disguised as scientific theories: perceptions that a priori discard any possible change of behaviour induced through active cooperation are scientifically unsound - and politically dangerous. The resulting policies may offer China or other rising powers not enough political, economic or security incentives to further pursue multilateral cooperation, both regionally and globally.

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